

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL DANIEL J. SHANAHAN,
COMMANDER, 1ST CAVALRY BRIGADE, MND-B VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM BAGHDAD, IRAQ
MODERATOR: LIEUTENANT COMMANDER BROOK DEWALK, USN, OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF
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LT. DEWALT: Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of
Defense Blogger's Roundtable for Monday, October 15, 2007. My name is
Lieutenant Commander Brook DeWalt with the Office of the Secretary of Defense
Public Affairs, and I will be moderating our call today.

A note to our bloggers on the line today, please remember to clearly
state your name and your blog or organization in advance of your question.
Please respect our guest's time keeping your questions succinct and to the
point.

Today, our guest from Iraq is U.S. Army Colonel Daniel J. Shanahan,
commander of the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade. Colonel Shanahan is here today to
provide an operational update of the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade combat operations
in the Baghdad area of operations.

We're pleased to have you as a guest today, Colonel. Do you have any
opening statement?

COL. SHANAHAN: Certainly. Thank you, Brook. And I appreciate --
again, my name is Colonel Dan Shanahan. I'm the commander of the 1st Air
Cavalry Brigade, the aviation brigade for the 1st Cavalry Division that's out of
Fort Hood, Texas. I'm currently serving in Taji, Iraq which is about 12
kilometers north of Baghdad.

Just to give a little background on the air cavalry brigade, we've got
about 3,000 strong in our organization, mostly U.S. soldiers. We also have
airmen, one sailor and about a couple hundred contractors that help provide
support to our brigade. Our main mission here is to provide the coalition and
U.S. forces support here in Baghdad. We've been on the ground now for about 13
months. We continue to do operations each day, putting aircraft into theater 24
hours a day. It's said for every one hour that we've been on the ground that
we've flown about 10 hours so far in the air, to give an idea of how much we're
doing right now.

Our organization is made up of three primary aircraft with all our
support elements. Those aircraft are the H-64 Apache. And those missions that
we conduct every day are reconnaissance for each one of the Multi-National
Division Baghdad, each one of those brigade combat teams on specific

reconnaissance objectives that they have each day. We also provide reconnaissance ahead of convoys that are out moving throughout the area of Baghdad. And also, any time there's a troops in contact, typically within minutes we hair aircraft on the scene providing support to coalition and U.S. forces.

The next aircraft type that we've got, the UH-60 Blackhawk. Right now, we're doing air assault operations about every other night. Those air assault operations are typically pinpoint targets that we do to support activities in Baghdad. We're at about a 24-hour planning cycle for those. We also support other Special Operation forces and so on with air assault operations.

We also provide command and control and also MEDEVAC operations. To date, we've flown over 3,000 MEDEVAC missions, and some of those are multiple missions where we'll move wounded soldiers from a point of contact to a hospital and then from that hospital to another location, to move them from theater so it doesn't have any direct implications on the number of wounded soldiers that we've moved.

The last type of helicopter that we have is a CH-47. CH-47s are a workhorse, primarily flying at night. We have done air assault operations with the CH-47s that can move about 30 armed coalition or Iraqi force to an objective area. And typically, whenever we fly any of our aircraft, we fly in pairs just based on protection for our systems. We also have, as part of our team, unmanned aerial vehicles that we pool as part of the division's asset. And at any given time, we've got four to six unmanned aerial vehicles over the Baghdad area providing reconnaissance and security for operations throughout Baghdad.

We also have a full complement of support to those maintenance providers, again 24/7 -- refuelers, armament personnel, able to provide re-arm capability for our helicopters and air traffic controllers and those that help the daily business of our operations.

Taji, as said, is the busiest, single site in Baghdad itself based on the number of helicopters here. Also of note is the Iraqi air force that we share the air field with. Across the ramp from where we are, the Iraqi air force is in its infancy coming back having rebuilt. And we help share the skies over Baghdad flying together. To date, we've flown a few joint missions. Iraqis are on their own right now supporting the government of Iraq with missions, moving their critical passengers some places here in Baghdad.

With those opening comments, that's kind of the things that I'd like to cover. And I'd be interested in your comments and grateful for you participating with us here today.

LT. DEWALT: Fantastic, thanks a lot, Colonel. And let's go right into some blogger Q&A.

First, from Bruce McQuain.

Q Colonel, Bruce McQuain with qando.net. My question -- you guys have been there for 13 months. What is your or how have you seen your missions change over that time frame, your mission mix? And secondly, could you address sort of the op tempo and any changes that have occurred in that 13 months?

COL. SHANAHAN: Certainly. The mission mix currently has changed significantly as we've continued to bring forces. As you know, with the surge

the president announced just after the first of the year, we've continued to move forces into combat. When we first started operations in the October-November time frame last year, we had to fight into a lot of areas (that were wrecked ?). Those areas today are peaceful. The normalcy has returned in those areas.

The operations that we did early on, Operation Together Forward, we finished up some of the missions with the 4th Infantry Division were to help restore security. And those missions have changed as we've helped root out al Qaeda from large portions of the area.

Our op tempo changed significantly in the April time frame when significant amounts of ground forces came into theater. Our highest op tempo was in the April through June time frame. At that time frame, they had brought an additional aviation brigade into theater from one of the divisions. And the introduction of that particular organization helped bring the number of aviation brigades from the United States Army to four. And our op tempo has stabilized from that time frame. In fact, from the aspect of cargo and communications, moving soldiers around the battlefield, we have adequate numbers of aircraft to be able to support all of our operations, whether those be air assault operations or moving command and control or other missions that we provide. Still with the attack helicopters, they continue to have reconnaissance missions if they're not in direct contact. So those have maintained a high op tempo throughout.

About 10 percent higher op tempo from the previous units in the Baghdad airspace from the previous units, and I think that's been pretty close to traditional of what's happened over the last three or four years. The units that come in fly about 10 percent more. The only platform that has flown significant numbers more has been the UAVs. We've upgraded that and put more focus on the unmanned aerial systems that we've flown, and those have flown almost twice as much as they have in previous rotations. I think that's a good description of our mission mix and our op tempo.

Q Thanks very much.

LT. DEWALT: Great. And next (we'll hear from ?) Andrew Lubin.

Q Great. Colonel, Andrew Lubin from U.S. Cavalry ONPoint. I appreciate you taking the time to speak with us today. How does the 1st Air Cav work with the IAs? And part two of that, are you providing any training or anything to get them started to stand up with their own air assets?

COL. SHANAHAN: Right now our work with the Iraqi army has been a process that we've started from the beginning. During the first portion of the event when we first got here last fall, for every air assault that we went on, a lot of those air assaults were combined air assaults with Iraqi forces. We are able to train them to a very high level. And during that time frame, Iraqi aerial forces from the Iraqi air force was just getting started. We've had an opportunity to move U.S. helicopters and do static loading and have those units trained. There were some issues up front, because they did not operate at night to any great degree, and that has changed significantly over time. So the air assault benefits that we gained -- (inaudible) -- and so on are gained and also gained by those Iraqi forces that have those. Within our partnership with the ground forces there are some units that are more advanced than others that had a higher capability, and based on the willingness of the forces or their capabilities we're doing more and more.

Right now, with over 200 air assault operations at least 50 percent of our operations have been done with Iraqi forces as part of those operations so a significant amount. To date they have not done a pure Iraqi air assault operation using their air force. Typically it's been a command and control moving high-level dignitaries and military leaders around, but I could see in the next year or so that the -- a capability could be there to do air assaults with the Iraqi air force and the Iraqi military -- Iraqi army specifically.

Q Great -- thank you.

LT. DEWALT: Great, and next if we can go to Christian Lowe.

Q Hi, Colonel Shanahan. Question here -- earlier on this year you guys faced a pretty tough threat -- air defense threat from insurgents and al Qaeda and that sort of thing. Can you describe how that threat -- (inaudible) -- in terms of, you know, MANPADS and that sort of thing and what you're seeing on the field, especially from more sophisticated systems that may be coming from Iran?

COL. SHANAHAN: Certainly. Right off the bat, we have lost -- tragically lost two air crews to threat from the ground. In two separate engagements we lost soldiers in that, and the sophistication is out there and that was relatively early on, just past the first part of the year. Again, our hearts and thoughts go out to those families that have lost true heroes for that. As far as with respect to the threat each, month there are about 200 engagements against helicopters and that was true when we were -- when we came into country. It's decreased a little bit now here recently but for the majority of our time in theater we had about 200 engagements against helicopters.

The sophistication has changed at some degree. You've heard our military leaders come on about the support from countries that are supporting terrorism and bringing those systems in. Right now, the technology that we have as far as our helicopters to defeat those systems is significant but as we change the enemy continues to change. So it's a chess game that we're currently -- spend a lot of time and effort making sure that we have it. It's not just technology -- it's also tactics, and we've got -- we're flying a little bit differently. We're putting a lot of effort in our planning and each time our aircraft go out we do a pretty good job of analyzing what the threat is based on that and also reducing what the -- (inaudible) -- based on our after-action reviews following engagements.

In the last few months, the sophistication of the engagements has been high and right now we've been able to defeat those systems. But those are things that our science and technology is continuing to look at -- our tactics. Absolutely we're looking at each day the complexity with regard to numbers of points that engaged a single helicopter -- was a key point in the downing of our helicopters, and based on our aggressive reconnaissance or aggressive targeting of these groups we've been able to help negate those ambushes for our helicopters and I think that's a large measure in our success here recently.

Q Okay, thanks. And a quick follow-up -- can you describe your -- the aviation safety record you guys have had in terms of Class A, Class B mishaps -- that sort of thing?

COL. SHANAHAN: Right now we're on a record-breaking thing. I don't want to jinx anything but we've done very, very well in our safety. Our army continuing here in Iraq has done very, very well as far as a safety record. We've done well. We've had some accidents on the ground. Fortunately, we have not experienced any catastrophic accidents in the air and I think that's based on good leadership and some good efforts by each one of our pilots as we go through. We know that the threat is out there so it's a composite risk that we take -- both the accidental risk that's out there and also the risk that's based on the threat. So we look at that hard and try to reduce it, and right now the trends have been positive and even this -- in this extension I think that our pilots are more focused in trying to finish strong in this operation and complete our mission here in Iraq.

Q Okay -- thanks.

LT. DEWALT: Great. And also, Christian, could you state your organization for the --

Q Oh, yeah -- sorry. With military.com.

LT. DEWALT: Great. Thanks a lot. Did we have any other bloggers join in the middle of that?

Q Yeah. Austin Bay.

LT. DEWALT: Fantastic, Austin. If you could state your blog and --

Q Well, austinbay.net. I'm actually -- I told Jack Holt I was going to have to leave here before 10:20. I served with Dan Shanahan in 2004 and mostly I just kind of wanted to hear Dan's own update now that he's got a command of his own air (cab ?) brigade so -- hello, Dan, and that's why I'm here.

LT. DEWALT: Fantastic -- fantastic. Now, did we have any bloggers with any follow-up questions?

COL. SHANAHAN: No, I want to listen to Austin.

Q Well, all right, Dan. I'll ask you a question and again, I'm -- my time really is short here. The new Baghdad security plan -- one of the -- I interviewed David Kilcullen about two months ago and he talked about the way that neighborhoods were -- well, he didn't want to use the word divided but they were -- the way they were secured using both presence, joint security stations and also walls, barriers, and the like. If it doesn't violate OPSEC could you tell us how your outfit helps support that component of the Baghdad security plan? Because that's -- that is very, very -- it's very, very -- it struck me as a very, very precise kind of -- precision kind of operation.

COL. SHANAHAN: (Inaudible) -- where that those specific barriers had to go -- where were the specific places that we needed to have a joint security station where American forces could be partnered with Iraqi police, with national police, and other assets to do joint planning and joint operations from, I think a lot of the keys were where those assessments went. Typically under the cover of darkness those barriers were moved and set up so families would go to bed one time -- the next morning they would have hundreds of meters of concrete that would separate potential bombers -- those (DBIDs ?) from entering particular neighborhoods or providing security. I think that the

assessment was a key element and then just going through doing some security operations and direct military operations to help set that. It continues today. There are some areas today where normalcy has returned based on those barriers and based on that security assessment and that plan that was put together, and I think that's probably been part of the strength of the current security plan that we have -- (inaudible) -- forces we have.

Q Well, you mentioned that you had four to six UAVs up and I know this is why I was hesitant about the OPSEC part of it. I was just assuming that you had provided constant aerial surveillance or a presence to try to watch those neighborhoods so that was really where my question was going. So I'm going to have to leave. Thanks a lot, and Colonel Shanahan, good to catch up with you.

COL. SHANAHAN: Thanks, Austin. Wish you well.

Q Yeah -- bye.

Q Can I ask a follow-up? This is Christian Lowe from military.com. Hello?

Yeah, I'm still on. I --

COL. SHANAHAN: This is Colonel Shanahan. Go ahead.

Q Okay. Yeah, thanks.

Colonel Shanahan, you know, you mentioned you had a bunch of air assault missions and some with the IAs. A couple questions on that -- number one, specifically how are the IAs incorporated into those air assault missions? I mean, is it like, you know, left-seat, right-seat kind of thing? Is there one U.S. troop, one IA, one U.S. troop, one IA in the aircraft -- that sort of thing? And then on a broader note, from sort of a 30,000 foot perspective, how effective are Air Assault missions in this counterinsurgency and why does one sort of pull that, you know, off the shelf when want to do a raid or something? Why do an air assault?

COL. SHANAHAN: A couple -- let me start with the first part of that, on how the missions with the Iraqi Army or Iraqi Security Forces because it's been more than just the Army that has participated. It's the full combination. We've had operations where we've had very few U.S. military as part of that package, where it was IA that are trained to a high level, a degree that operate. And we're the mechanism to move them from the pickup zone to the landing zone to help support their operation.

Q Okay.

COL. SHANAHAN: We've also got initially we had a great mix where it was about a 50-50 mix where we had U.S. and Iraqis. But that has trended to be less and less over time. The benefit in the air assault operation based on the current threat, which are IEDs and so on, is just moving to the engagement areas. They set up pretty much a defensive belt that has to be penetrated, and if we can jump over that defensive belt onto a particular objective, all the better to help minimize the damage that it's caused to potential troops as they drive into those particular areas. The surprise that we're able to gain from that has been significant and continues to this day.

Q Okay.

COL. SHANAHAN: The counterinsurgency as we get intelligence based on what's up, if those are provided, then we have a reliability that meets a certain threshold, those come through. We don't have success each time we do this, but there is certainly success overall for the kind of operations that we have been able to eliminate the threat that's been out there that we go after on those particular air assault missions.

Q Do we have time for one more follow-up?

LT. DEWALT: Yeah, I think we're good.

Q Colonel Andrew Lubin from U.S. Calvary On Point.

Do the Iraqis have air assets of their own? Do they have any rotary wing, or do you supply everything?

COL. SHANAHAN: Yes, the Iraqis have -- right now they've got both fixed-wing and they've got a C-130 and other fix-wing capable aircraft that they've got within that that they're flying missions throughout Iraq right now. They've got the MI-17 that's right now training and they've got the one squadron that's already built and another squadron that going through. The workhorse right now is a UH- 1. It's a -- it's got -- that workhorse of the the United States for some time has been flying missions, and that's the mission that does power line security missions, pipeline security missions. They'll fly the Government of Iraq officials to different points. They've done a minimal amount of medical evacuation where they had to move from a hospital to another hospital site. And I do see an expansion in that over time.

Then they've got a training squadron where they use a -- basically a Bell JetRanger right now to help train. The majority of their force is former Iraqi Air Force officers that have flown in the past that are now coming back to their force, and their numbers are growing. They do have a large number of young men and women that are coming forward to serve that are going through initial training. And it's good to see, but as far as capability, for when they're going to have a full capability, it's still a number of years out right now. But they continue to grow by leaps and bounds each month.

Q Okay. Thanks.

LT. DEWALT: Great. And any other final follow-up questions?

Okay. Well, we want to thank you very much.

And Colonel Shanahan, do you have any final comments to the group?

COL. SHANAHAN: As I said earlier, that the reduction in violence and improved security situation in Baghdad is brought forth by the number of soldiers that we do have and also the contributions that our forces provide. It's a joint operation and we could not be doing this without the Iraqis as they continue to come forward. But today the BOC commander, the Baghdad Operation Command commander General Abud was here and talking to our young UAV operators. And then in fact, he got to launch one of the UAVs today. I'm very proud that he was the first Iraqi to launch a UAV here in Baghdad. What he saw was technology that's out there, but also what it takes to help train that. So I think the piece that he saw, that he took away is, he needs to make sure that

the training piece to have the great young men and women like what we have in the United States Army's military today can be transferred to his force. And I think that was a big takeaway, and it just shows to the leadership here in Iraq that they bring forward.

And also on the behalf of my formation itself, we couldn't be doing this without the great support of people that debate what's going on here and also support our soldiers. And we just appreciate this opportunity to dialogue with you today and to tell you about some of the good things that are happening and talk about some of the things that we do need to improve here in the future. And we look forward to getting back to our families and we appreciate this opportunity to share our story here today.

Thank you.

LT. DEWALT: Great. Thank you very much, Colonel Shanahan. That's been fantastic information today.

Today's program will be available online at the Blogger's Roundtable link on dod.mil, where you can access the story based on today's call along with source documents such as this audio file, print transcripts and the colonel's biography. If there are any questions about the program, please contact DOD New Media at 703-428- 1204.

Again, thank you very much, Colonel Shanahan. And also, thank you to our blogger participants. And this does conclude today's event and please feel free to disconnect at any time. I'll stay on the line if there are questions.

END.